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ABSTRACT

For field based training for prospective school administrators to be effective, several of its underlying conditions must be examined. First, because of so many constraints on their time, principals are not really able to assume the part expected of them in the field based training of new administrators. Second, many trainees approach formal preparation with little enthusiasm. Many have already been identified by their districts for administrative positions and view getting mandated certification as a necessary inconvenience. Third, the study of educational administration now embodies a split between theory and practice. Instead, trainees should be educated concerning how educational theory can be used to solve practical problems. Solving practical problems necessitates developing, adapting, testing, refining, and retesting procedures and products. This is the sort of activity usually described as research and development (R and D). If trainees apply an R and D approach to problems in the field, their presence, instead of sapping precious time from principals, will facilitate the solving of principals' everyday problems. Finally, professors of educational administration must not be mere "knowledge builders" or mere "trainers." Instead, they too must be developers of the type responsible for R and D work. This role of developer includes orientation, communication, adaptation, and training. (Author/JM)

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FIELD BASED PREPARATION: SOME UNDERLYING CONCERNS

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(The following article is a paper prepared for the Interest Group on Program Development of NCPEA and will be presented for discussion in the Interest Group meetings. Ed.)

Field based training has now become a common term in educational program planning. Its use is based upon assumptions that conceptual tools learned in the classroom require concrete illustration in the field; that a period of familiarity with practice is needed--the flow of paper, the routines, the daily encounters with people and problems; that practical experience with technical-managerial tools in a specific setting is required; that a perspective is constructed for relating values and social movements and conditions to school practices; and that the perspective administrator needs testing on the job before he is released to practice. Whether field based training can be conceived, organized and operated to justify any or all of these assumptions remains to be demonstrated.

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The purpose of this brief paper is not to deal with the necessary conditions and arrangements for field based experiences in a program of preparation--requiring it, its place in the preparation route, needs for inter-institutional cooperation, and the like; nor is it to examine the types and nature of experiences to be provided once a commitment to field based preparation is made. There is little question that various forms of field based preparation exist and that it is considered necessary. The basis of this paper is that it appears to be important to examine the underlying conditions that need to be made explicit and need to be dealt with if field based training is to be effective in reaching any expectations for it, except by accident. The argument to be made in this paper is 1) that the backgrounds, problems and working conditions of the practitioner are inadequately known; 2) that the status and "mind set" of the trainee present serious problems; 3) that there is an inadequate understanding of the knowledge base and its function in the preparation of practitioners; and 4) that the role of the professor is not sufficiently understood.

Conditions in each of the four areas listed above serve to facilitate or impede the effectiveness of any preparation program but are particularly critical to field based training. All four areas encompass most of the major problems impacting the relationships between university programs and the practice of educational administration.

The Practitioner in Relation to Field Based Preparation

While the actual problems and working conditions of the practitioner are inadequately known, information from the National Study of Secondary School Principals, sponsored by NASSP does give us some strong indications of the most important problems and the working conditions the practitioner must live with. In addition, the data also permits some speculations regarding the difficulties associated with field based training for administrators. Data relating to the position of principal was selected because it is the most current available but also because the principalship is the first line position in educational administration, the one most often used for internships and other field based experiences, and because it represents the career route to the superintendency, and other administrative posts, even the professorship.

The average work week of the principal is 54.5 hours; with the majority of this time spent in the following areas (in descending rank order): School management, personnel related activities, student activities, student behavior, and program development. On the other hand, these principals believe that the time they spend on these areas of responsibility should be in a different priority order: Program development, personnel, school management, student activities, and long range planning.

How the principal spends time and how he/she desires to spend it, seems to be chiefly determined by five factors: (1) the efficiency and dedication of the principal, (2) the defined tasks of American schools, (3) the broad educational issues which affect high schools, (4) the factors that constrain the principals' ability to carry out his/her responsibilities, and (5) "road blocks" preventing principals from doing the job they would like to do. The efficiency and dedication of the practitioner could only be a subjective judgment, but we have objective data to examine the other factors.

The principals identified the most important tasks of American schools as: acquisition of basic skills, development of positive self-concepts, development of skills to operate a technological society, and development of moral and spiritual values. These tasks closely identify with how the practitioners believe time should be spent; with a heavy emphasis on program development, personnel, and long range planning. In other words, to insure that these tasks are carried out, more time must be spent on developing programs, evaluating and improving personnel, and long range planning.

This same pattern of identification with how time should be spent is also evidenced by the agreement shown for the most important broad educational issues which affect high schools. These issues--special programs for academically talented students; universal secondary education; special programs for handicapped, ethnic, non-English students; and obtaining community support before undertaking major curricular changes--demand that more time be spent on program development and planning.

Yet, it is the major/minor constraints and the "road blocks" which determine how the principal does spend his time. The constraints--student lack of motivation, parent's lack of interest, student absenteeism, student discipline problems, and teacher unprofessionalism--force the practitioner to spend his/her planning and development time on personnel and student behavior. More time must be devoted to management, personnel and student behavior to handle the "road blocks"--administrative detail, lack of time, variations in the abilities of teachers, apathetic or irresponsible parents, and problem students.

One issue stands out that is not readily explainable. The principals noted that it was important to obtain community support before undertaking major curricular changes and that parent's lack of interest plus apathetic or irresponsible parents were major constraints and "road blocks". Yet in ranking how time is and should be spent, the principals ranked community (PTA, advisory groups, parent conferences) low on the scales. Apparently, the principals have no time nor feel they should find time to work with the community or else they believe that this is an area that is not really a part of their responsibility.

The practitioner, in a very real sense, is a product of his/her working environment. The ranks of how time is actually spent is a reaction to the everyday working conditions of the position, while the listing of how time should be spent indicates actions that would ideally head off problems before they can occur. Administrative detail and lack of time appear to be the main culprits preventing the principal from devoting the time necessary to plan and develop programs to meet the tasks and issues of American schools; which, incidentally, could help reduce or eliminate some of the constraints and "road blocks" affecting the position.

A general reaction to these data imply to us a position heavily loaded in terms of time demands and one in which the allocation of effort is not in keeping with the principals' desires. The role appears to be heavily impacted, severely limiting those activities in which the competencies stressed by training programs might be exploited for the benefit of trainees. Under these circumstances alone we find it difficult to believe that the principal is in a position to assume a significant training responsibility. The principal needs help, and he may see the assistance provided by an intern as useful. This is

hardly reassuring in terms of other types of field based experiences and even in terms of the kinds and quality of experiences that might be available to an intern.

The dilemma occurs in the fact that professions generally hold that preparation for practice is a responsibility of the entire profession. If this is true, where is the time and commitment of the practitioner? Field experiences must complement academic preparation and provide for the genuine practice of administration--learning about and induction into a professional role. This is a demanding task which field based preparation has yet to demonstrate in any verifable way.

The Trainee in Relation to Field Based Preparation

Unlike the more mature applied fields, such as engineering and medicine, the educational administrator can be characterized as acquiring a position and then seeking the preparation for it. School districts typically identify the promising administrator and encourage him to get the training needed to satisfy a mandated certification requirement. This practice, which according to our data from the national study is more the mode now than in 1965, places the trainee in the position of viewing formal preparation as an inconvenient and often irrelevant hurdle. The district tends to reinforce this attitude especially when the district has already identified the person because of qualities they desire, not because of competencies the preparation program provides.

In cases where trainees already "belong" to the district the district is in control of the people as well as the jobs. Districts feel that they have a right to control the preparation of their people for their jobs. The political bind this creates becomes most pressing when joint planning and cooperative effort is involved as is the case with field based training programs. Ramifications of this condition extend into all areas of interest of departments of educational administration and create problems for departments within the university itself.

In addition to matters of allegiance, motivation and orientation to the values of the profession, there are others which involve the trainee in the field. In most cases the trainee is an "outsider" to the school, if not the district, where field based experiences are sought. Frequently, the problems which could provide the stress and reality required for training are not made available, and when they are, the "outsider" status interfers with genuine participation. Dan Lortie in an assessment of the administrative internship has observed that the intern is acting, not studying and replicating the behavior of the experienced, successful practitioner.

Undoubtedly there are counters to these conditions and there are examples to illustrate where these conditions do not exist or have been overcome. Indeed, if there were not, a case for field based experience could not be made. However, field based experience cannot be sustained on the basis of testimonials--although these could provide construct validity for the concept. What is going to be needed, and soon, is empirically derived demonstrations of predictive validity. Field based preparation attempts could be subjected to experiment and inquiry and could serve to refine and validate concepts relating to theory-practice questions.

Knowledge Base

Three domains of interest represent the territory of any applied field. These are 1) concepts (knowledge) of basic disciplines that are fundamental to, 2) treating practical problems of the field, and 3) the processes by which knowledge is translated into usable products and processes in the solution of practical problems. Jean Hills in an insightful paper (Educational Administration Quarterly, XIV:1, Winter 1978) examines the status of educational administration as an applied profession. His point, appropriate to an examination of the knowledge base of educational administration, is that an applied science cannot be a theoretical science. This is because an applied science seeks "the effective attainment of practical goals where serious interests of clients are at stake." Unlike a disciplinary science it has no major responsibility for the development of theory nor for the pursuit of knowledge in terms of theoretical systems.

W. W. Charters (Administrative Theory as a Guide to Action, 1960, 178-79) provides an explanation of why Hills' point is true. He states that scientific findings consist of observed relationships between two or more minute bits of reality which is not capable of predicting the course of complex interwoven events as faced by practitioners. Further, the findings of the social scientist do not always hold true even for the restricted and highly controlled variables that he examines--he deals with probabilities and is content with the identification of small measures of relationships. The point to be made here is that the applied science orients its study and development in terms of the problems of the field and it searches the disciplines (in this case the social-behavioral disciplines) for relevant and related knowledge. The importance (relevance) of study is derived from the problems of the field and evidence of successful and unsuccessful ways of dealing with problems. The rational-cognitive base for examining problems and communicating about them is the supporting disciplines.

Given that practical problems and conditions of the field provide the focus of study and that a variety of theoretical systems are required in their study (domains 1 and 2 of the knowledge base), we arrive at domain three. In almost all cases successful attack upon problems of the field requires that procedures, products, and the like be developed and/or adapted, tested, refined, retested, and installed. This domain of responsibility, largely ignored by the professor of educational administration, represents the role of developer and encompasses the competencies of R and D. The nature of R and D is treated extensively in the literature but not the literature of educational administration (see McCleary, "R and D: A Perspective...", CCBC Notebook, 6:4, July 1977).

The training procedures for field based preparation can themselves become the object of R & D procedures. In fact, they represent some of the few examples of R & D efforts worthy of the name in the field of educational administration. UCEA activities are notable examples as are a number of projects that have fed the content of the NCPEA Interest Group on Program Development and reported over the past seven years in this Notebook. This position does not denigrate research efforts that are aimed specifically at the creation of new knowledge or the testing of concepts from the supporting disciplines in the area of educational administration. The McCleary article cited above argues that this type of research is necessary to and compatible with R & D efforts. However, the proper perspective is that R & D types of effort should be the normal, regular activity of scholarly effort in an applied field with the attendant values and

priorities given to it. This is not the case at present. Illustrative of this is the flow of funds in education to educational psychology, curriculum, measurement and evaluation and to special education as compared to educational administration.

The Professor in Relation to Field Based Training

Interestingly in 1960, Roald Campbell, working with W. W. Charters and William Gragg (in Administrative Theory as a Guide to Action, cited above), dealt with the professor's role as "the role of the developer". He provides an analysis of what the role should be which we recommend as a necessary beginning point for the professor today. Without the space to do justice to his argument he advocates that the professor of educational administration must become a developer if he is to justify his existence. The role of developer includes four major kinds of activities: orientation, communication, adaptation, and training. Orientation implies knowledge of the field of education--social, psychological, historical, philosophical and curriculum theory, knowledge of educational administration and related applied fields of administration--business, military and government, and an orientation to basic disciplines--both social sciences and humanities. Communication implies that the professor use the orientations noted to communicate with the field. He is the middle man between those who seek knowledge (disciplines) and those who attempt to gain practical ends (practice of administration). Adaptation implies that the professor adapts concepts and findings to the operational practices of educational administration. Educational administration is in many ways unique--there are common and unique factors in every situation that require adaptation and refinement in application. Finally, the developer is engaged in the training problem.

This is an imposing array of competencies, indeed, but the professor is not an isolated, self-sufficient entity although this is one point of our criticism--that he has tended to think of himself as such. Rather, the professor must see and ensure that the collegial relations both with his colleagues in his department, his college, his university and the field bring about the linkages required for successful R & D efforts. He must understand his role and communicate it effectively as he undertakes his basic function. This we argue is to get an R & D effort as the focus of his activity and to orient himself in terms of it.

The professor of educational administration has not, we argue, understood his role nor oriented himself properly to a viable productive existence. He has either assumed the role of the knowledge builder and attempted to perform as though his field was a basic discipline or he has assumed the role of the trainer--the professor of practice. The former stance has alienated him from the field, confused the orientation of preparation programs and raised questions about the role of departments of educational administration. The latter stance, the trainer role, focuses upon preparation of the new practitioner in terms of current best practice. This results in attention to the mastery of quickly outdated techniques. The major limitation of this stance results from the fact that the professor of practice attempts to send out the student as though he were somehow a finished product. As with the knowledge builder the result is loss of continuing contact with the practitioner in an R & D relationship and lack of meaningful attention to the problems of the field.

In each of the above roles, knowledge builder or professor of practice, the resulting relationship with the field can be characterized as 1) marginal - remote from understanding of real needs and the perspective to identify significant problems, 2) divided in allegiance - seen as coming to the field only to get something (knowledge builder) or seen as not contributing in a legitimate way to the university mission (professor as trainer), and 3) being the "walking encyclopedia" or the super expert which impairs a meaningful, continuing relationship with the practitioner.

Granted that the two roles are overdrawn in order to emphasize a point, we submit that these two stances represent the direction of emphasis all too often assumed by professors of educational administration. When a department becomes overloaded with either type, or is about equally divided among the two, serious consequences result. When few or no types who represent an R & D approach (professor as developer) are present, little in the way of long term, effective benefits result.

The role of the professor as developer and the conscious, unrelenting use of an R & D approach to the problems of the field offers a solution to the proper exploitation of field based preparation. It offers promise of establishing the preparation program as viable in the university setting and creditable with school districts. Further, benefits would ensue in the clarification of the professor's role and in the establishment of educational administration as an applied science.

The paper was undertaken primarily to illicit thought and discussion. The argument has been presented that four concerns (practitioner, trainee, knowledge base and professor) present underlying conditions critical to the success of field based training, that these conditions are often left unexamined in favor of the arrangements and types of experience to be provided and that these conditions present issues which go well beyond field based training itself and impact upon educational administration as an applied field of study.